



February 23, 2024

Doug Nishek
Bonners Ferry Ranger District
6286 Main Street
Bonners Ferry, ID 83805

Subject: Katkee Fuels Proposed Action

Dear Doug:

I am writing on behalf of the Idaho Conservation League (ICL) to comment on the Proposed Action for the Katkee Fuels Project. Founded in 1973, the mission of ICL is to create a conservation community and pragmatic, enduring solutions that protect and restore the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the land and wildlife you love. ICL's seven strategic initiatives include confronting climate change, recovering Idaho's wild salmon and steelhead, cleaning up the Snake River, protecting public land, restoring abundance and diversity of Idaho's wildlife, safeguarding North Idaho lakes and waters, and reducing pollution. ICL achieves these goals through public outreach and professional advocacy. With offices in Boise, McCall, Ketchum, and Sandpoint, the organization is a consistent, statewide voice for conservation in Idaho and represents more than 26,000 members and supporters. ICL's members and supporters care deeply about protecting and restoring the environment.

The purpose of the Katkee Fuels Project is to reduce the risk of fire to neighboring communities and municipal watersheds, respond to insect and disease infestations, improve water quality, improve forage for grizzly bears, and contribute to the local forest products sector.

Given the extensive number of units proposed in the northeast part of the project area, we recommend retaining approximately one-third of regeneration units in patches to provide greater diversity of forest structure and composition. Doing so will provide some cover for wildlife while mitigating visual impacts.

ICL appreciates the Forest Service's intent to improve forage for grizzly bears while maintaining habitat security. However, it is unclear how grizzly habitat security will be maintained or improved because the Proposed Action involves seven miles of new road construction. The Scoping Notice provides definitions for various types of road work, including road reconstruction and maintenance, road storage, temporary roads, and road decommissioning. Yet, no road storage or decommissioning is proposed. So it is unclear how grizzly bear habitat security will be maintained given the net increase in road mileage that is proposed.

The Scoping Notice discusses applicable direction from the 2015 Land Management Plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. Because more than 1,000 acres of timber harvest is also proposed on adjacent lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, it is equally important to ensure that the project complies with the BLM's Resource Management Plan for the Coeur d'Alene Field Office.

Finally, ICL appreciates that the Forest Service delineated the Community Protection Zone as it applies to Idaho Roadless Areas. It appears that the Proposed Action complies with the Idaho Roadless Rule.

Sincerely,

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